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## A NEIGHBORHOOD APPRENTICE CLASS

BY EMILIE MUESER, *Librarian, Lucas County Library, Maumee, Ohio*

In a paper on "Secondary education in library work," given at the last A. L. A. meeting, Miss Jessie Welles suggested the possibility of several small libraries conducting an apprentice class or a training class on the same basis as outlined by her for a larger library or a branch library system.

This experiment was made during the past winter by three small libraries situated in three different towns within easy access of each other. A fourth and larger library made valuable contributions, not because it had entered into the coöperative scheme, but because it was interested in the experiment. The outline proposed by Miss Welles was followed in the main, with a few adjustments to local conditions.

The immediate purpose of this experiment was, first, to see whether it would be possible to carry out a plan of coöperation among libraries too small individually to conduct a training class; and second, whether such a class could be made worth while to these libraries and to the students.

The following is a brief outline of the course and of deductions drawn from this experiment:

The complete course covered a period of three months. An entrance examination was given, and out of eight candidates taking the examination, five were chosen for the class. All of these candidates but one were high school graduates and this one person had had some experience in one of the libraries engaged in this coöperative scheme. During the first week one of the accepted students withdrew, leaving four to continue and complete the course.

Approximately five lectures were given each week, and ten hours were in return required for practice work. Most of the lecture work was carried by two of the libraries, the other two making occasional contributions. Three of these libraries were used for practice work. These libraries were in character, one a uni-

versity library, one a county library in the first stages of organization and the third a small town library. The technical courses each averaged six lecture hours; book selection and the special lectures given by persons representing various phases of social and civic work, each averaged twelve lecture hours. Children's work was entirely omitted, principally because there was no children's room for the students to work in, and also because before the end of the course unforeseen circumstances prevented the carrying out of the schedule as originally planned.

Whether this experiment was entirely worth while it is hard to say, but it did prove the possibility of coöperation among libraries satisfactorily situated. The definite profit in such coöperation being that it divided the burden of the work and permitted a partition of lecture subjects according to the better equipment of library or librarian, e. g. one library might be much better prepared to give lectures in cataloging, filing and classification than the other library, as was the case here, the university library having the best catalog to work with.

As to whether it was worth while for the libraries doing the work, this too may be answered in the affirmative. Each library received the same percentage of the students' practice time as that library gave to actual lecture time, the ratio to the whole being maintained. Though the libraries expected a return in service for the time they gave in lectures, considerable effort was made to connect the practice work with the lecture of the day, but where this was not possible greater consideration was given to the student that she might benefit rather than the library.

Our further consideration is, can such a course be really worth while to the students? This seemed the hazardous part of the experiment. In this case it might have been worth while, for each of the students

received an opportunity to enter library service shortly after her completion of the course. But almost immediately the salary question arose with the result that one entered the government service, one went back to teaching, the third entered the filing department of a business house, leaving only one out of the four remaining in library work, this being the one who was admitted to the class by virtue of her previous library experience. These changes occurred within two months after the course. No false promises had been made to the candidates, but hearing of the course they became interested and stuck to it to the end, yet when it came to doing actual library work, the salaries seemed insufficient.

Leaving out of consideration the salary question which will naturally be solved if libraries are standardized, let us consider the possible value of such a class. No promises of library positions were made, but the fact that vacancies were likely to occur made this experiment possible with all fairness to the students, and at the same time gave three libraries additional help at a time when it was needed, and also prepared these girls to fill minor library positions in the future. Of course, the opportunities for these girls were limited to the four libraries interested in the class, but if some recognized standard were established that apprentice classes of this character would have to meet, might not this be a way of increasing the supply of at least partially trained persons for vacancies in small libraries when they occur? The library schools train for bigger positions, the large libraries for their own service; what chance has the small library to improve unless some such plan is adopted?

To be sure all kinds of efforts have been made to reach the small library and in-

spire it with a broader vision of service, but such efforts are for existing conditions and do not provide for the future. Summer schools admit only those already in the service and no matter how bad the material, try to improve it. Library institutes, round tables, district meetings do the same, even commission visitors can only give friendly advice, though the supervising district librarian may go a step further, yet when vacancies occur are they not usually filled with local and untrained people?

Mr. John A. Lowe, agent Massachusetts Free Library Commission, says:

"Many of the difficulties and problems of the small library would be solved if the librarian question were settled. An active, intelligent community; a well organized and completely equipped plant; even a well chosen collection of books often fail to call with sufficient appeal to the librarian so that her service to the town is anything more than mediocre at best."

This is true, but in the scheme of library standardization and librarian certification, what about the small library, or rather, what about the librarian, for it would not be so difficult to standardize the library once the librarian is taken care of.

Not very many years ago the country school was in the position in which we now find the library. Through state organization schools were brought up to a recognized standard and the improvement rejoiced in, but now we are again discontent and are demanding centralized schools with at least an efficient principal at the head of each. Township schools are in course of construction everywhere because of this demand.

Some day libraries will also be centralized and small libraries merged into township and county libraries. In the meantime how can training be given to local people that will fit them to better fill positions they may be called on to fill?